

Christian Community

A Program Service of the Council for Social Action of the
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THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN A MASS SOCIETY

Findings of a Convocation on the Church's Message and Mission conducted by the Commission on Evangelism
and the Commission on Christian Social Action of The Evangelical and Reformed Church

I. The Church's Message

The Gospel is the good news of God's redemptive love for all mankind revealed and made effective in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as Savior, Redeemer and Lord; as such it is both our judgment and the source of light, strength, joy and renewed life for the individual, and also the source of justice and righteousness for society.

In Jesus Christ, as the Word become flesh, God reveals His wisdom, power and love for the purpose of reconciling the world unto Himself and man to his fellowman. This revelation is conveyed to us in the Holy Scriptures, illumined by the creative, working of the Holy Spirit.

In view of the seeming hopelessness of our present day situation, we still do not despair because we know that the power and love of God in Jesus Christ is sufficient. Therefore, we have confidence that, whether in this world or beyond history, God's righteous purpose will prevail. To this end God's creative power has called men into the fellowship of the Church of His Son.

This good news is the declaration of God's unswerving purpose to establish His holy will. In His will is our peace; in His Kingdom is fullness of life; in His presence is joy; by His grace is forgiveness and fellowship with Himself; by His Holy Spirit He invites us into the fellowship of His Church for the glory of God and for service to humanity.

We believe that God's righteousness is the real order for all men and for human society and demands of us justice and the spirit of reconciliation in our nation and between nations and the patient and persistent pursuit of peace. This is our responsibility to God for society, for the nation, and for the world of nations. His righteousness cannot be defied with impunity—to defy it is to destroy ourselves.

God has called us by His Gospel into "that freedom that makes us free" to serve Him in the service of our fellowman.

We rejoice that we are not alone in this great task, nor are we limited to our own resources. Though we are condemned by our guilt, our perversity and our weakness, in God we can know the fulfillment of life, through the regenerating power of His love.

Thus we believe that this Gospel of and through Christ is the wisdom of God unto salvation and through the power of Christ's resurrection it is the means to newness of life to all those who believe.

To confront ourselves and all the world with this saving Gospel is the primary task of the Church and of all Christians.

II. The Society in Which We Live

We are living in an acute, profound and urgent crisis. The spiritual center, which provided the matrix of European culture between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, has vanished leaving man at the mercy of conflicting secular forces.

Two mighty elements combined during these centuries to create a powerful civilization. The first was a vibrant confidence in human reason springing lustily from the Renaissance. The second was a dynamic religious faith that flowered in rich colors during the sixteenth century Reformation. Flowing into every channel of industry and human relationship, a tremendous impetus was given to the development of human concerns such as political government, commercial enterprise, scientific exploration, and religious experience.

Now, into this kind of world, inherited by us of later times, there has come a disintegration. There is, first of all, the disintegration in man's confidence in human reason. Early faith in it has narrowed into trust in "technical reason" alone. There is among us now an obsession with the potentials of technology and with the material products of technology. Then, too, there is the disintegration into "planning reason." Socialism, nationalism, industrial management at all levels, are planned projects that

indicate the consequence of this trend. Trust in planning on a mass scale to solve our problems has become an accepted policy. And, third, there is a deterioration in religious faith. After Luther, Calvin and Knox, an anemia set in which drained the sturdy faith of Christianity's foundational and stabilizing theology, leaving it at the mercy of a tempestuous emotionalism and an arid institutionalism.

The decline of these inner balances has left our generation compressed by the Mass Mind. The Mass Mind is a mind that operates only when it unthinkingly follows a mass pattern. With the spiritual center removed from a pattern of thought, man is helpless to measure his action by any personal commitment to a divine norm. As a result he is swept into the stream of mass secularistic thinking for purposes of security, favor and power. The television, the radio, idolatrous glorification of state or class, preoccupation with things and machines; in short, the propagation and force of materialistic objects and objectives sway his thinking in ceaseless ebbs and flows.

By such action and reaction upon the human mind this mass force has created a world in which the Church lives only precariously at the periphery.

This constant misdirection accentuates the instinctive disorders within the being of man. It drives him to aggression. This aggression brings about exaggerated competition among our leaders, creates a desire for cheap labor in industry, seeks increase of goods, and, *en masse*, leads to war. It also cultivates self-aggrandizement, the accumulation of wealth which often develops frustration, and all the attending disorders of mind and spirit.

The challenge this kind of a world offers to the churches is to break out of the Mass Mind. The beginnings of response should be manifest in the churches themselves.

Ministers and laymen must refuse to think in quantitative forms that measure value in terms of property and buildings, dollars and cents, or numbers alone. They must

COMMENDS REPORT FOR STUDY

It was a rare privilege to be able to share one day with the chairmen of the synodical committees on Evangelism and Christian Social Action at the occasion of their convocation in Cleveland on March 27-29. We came away with the conviction that it would prove profitable if all of our pastors as well as lay leaders could be given the opportunity to participate in similar meetings on a local level.

There was a time when the Church believed it to be her total mission to preach the gospel in order that those who believed might find assurance of the eternal salvation of their souls. Then followed the days in which members of the Church, convinced that no man can appear at the throne of grace except he bring his brother, found themselves tempted to emphasize what came to be known as the social gospel as though it were the total content of the Christian message.

This convocation at Cleveland was overruled by the conviction that it is, indeed, the mission of the Church to bring man into a personal relationship with God, as he has disclosed himself in Christ Jesus our Lord, so that in this fellowship his life is renewed. However, this renewal of life, manifesting itself in love for God, must of necessity also express itself in love for the fellowman. Clearly the messages and discussions at this convocation set forth the fact that no man can fully love his brother until this love is inspired by love for God who loved him first.

We most sincerely rejoice that at this meeting Evangelism and Christian Social Action were placed in an interdependent relationship to one another. It is, therefore, with much satisfaction that we recommend the careful study of the report of this convocation to all of our people.

L. W. GOEBEL, President
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not become obsessed with business methods and expedient strategies. That we have fallen prey to mass mind procedures and thought frames is a demonstrable fact. That the church has lost its distinctive function as a guiding and inspirational force is a tragic reality.

With concern for the future of the human world and for the role of the church in its redemption we recommend:

1. That our churches join in an all-out attack against the obsessions that breed the "mass mind," and in an effort to seek new ends for people which ends are to be found in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in the revealed Word of the Gospel, and in the nature of God.
2. That the members of our churches develop a Christian fellowship and discipline within the family to the end that a Christian standard of thought and action may be brought to bear upon secular ethics and non-Christian habits.
3. That the members of our churches use disciplines of Christian action for the purpose of guiding them in making ethical decisions and in bearing witness in their daily life to their Christian faith. In a mass society characterized by large power blocs and highly concentrated control of the channels of communication, there must be an over-all strategy and co-ordinated effort—in the local church and among churches in a community, within the denomination and among denominations—to further justice, reconciliation, and responsible citizenship.
4. That pastors challenge their members with some definite Christian service,

pointing out needs in the community or in the church that hunger for Christian action, and reminding them that unless their minds, hands and feet are dedicated to these missions, Christ may never have a part in their solution.

5. That pastors arrange for religious group meetings on an informal level with all those of the parish who wish to share a personal religious experience with them. Bible study, prayer, devotions, Christian conversations, personal commitments and consecration might form the bases for such meetings.
6. That pastors meet the needs of their people in pastoral counseling and in every conceivable way bridge the gap between themselves as clergymen and the members of their parish as laymen, sharing themselves with all their experience, learning and convictions.
7. That ministers should preach with knowledge of their subject and with a deep conviction of their faith. Only those subjects should be presented in sermons to which the minister can give his bursting heart and committed mind. Above all, sincerity of conviction and fervor for his Lord and his God should radiate his address. To facilitate such preaching an earnest fellowship of ministers might gather to share their thoughts on the critical problems of the hour.

With the aid of Almighty God and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, by a wise use of methods the church could regain its spiritual center and move its residence from the periphery of the world of men back into the heart of its teeming life.

III. Reaching the Man

With the World Council of Churches we affirm that the purpose of God is "to reconcile all men to Himself and to one another in Jesus Christ, His Son . . . It is God's will that the Gospel should be proclaimed to all men everywhere."

A. Who Is the Man To Be Reached?

The man we want to reach and with whom we must share our joyful experience is "Everyman." He is in the pew—and a foreigner to it. He is neither confined within certain geographical areas nor separated from us by occupation or color of skin. Whoever a man is and wherever he lives—him we seek and to him we must go. To describe him is to run the whole gamut from the lowest to the highest kind of man. On the one hand he is greedy, self-centered, insecure, separated from God, and possessed with an irrepressible sense of guilt. He is disillusioned, dominated by large groups, the victim of propaganda, and constantly defending himself from guilt and/or fear.

On the other hand he is innately religious and has a wistful yearning for Reality. He wants to be good but qualifies his commitment by not wanting to be too good. Nevertheless, good or bad, he is a man in need. Whenever or wherever we meet him, "Everyman" is under the sovereignty of God, is held responsible to the laws of God's Kingdom, and is the object of love and concern of every genuine follower of Christ.

B. Why the Church Wants to Reach Him

Many professing Christians must confess honestly that they do not really want to reach all men. They have made their selection and have limited their field of witnessing, thereby cutting themselves off from other children of God and compromising seriously the effectiveness of their testimony.

But those to whom Christ has become a living Reality can find no alternative but to reach every human being possible. The "love of Christ constraineth" us. Our experience binds us to witness to and preach the Gospel.

The Great Commission of Jesus Himself is clear, allowing us to exclude no one. He and we have a yearning that every man may have life and may have it more abundantly. Because this modern man is so needy the Christian Church has the high privilege and inescapable imperative to speak to the needs of the whole man out of brotherly concern and with the unique power of the Gospel of Christ. The solidarity of society, the possibility of brotherhood, our own salvation, and the intention of God—all demand the complete redemption of every

human being everywhere. Modern man must be reached by the Gospel so that he may find not only God but even himself.

C. Springs of Motivation In Man

As servants of the church, we do not seek to manipulate a person into a decision "for" Christ. Our concern is to enable him to see that Christ has chosen him and to help remove the barriers to his response. If we are to reach him so as to elicit a "yes" or "no" from him, we must know what causes him to make his decisions. Such drives as love, hate, fear, hunger, sex, lead him to make decisions. He desires a real security, power, action, and adventure. He seeks prestige, recognition and self-realization. Being alone in the world is abhorrent to him. He has a sense of responsibility and duty which may be appealed to. He is capable of responding to Christ's challenge to take up the cross and follow Him.

D. Methods of Stirring Up These Springs of Motivation

We cannot expect him to respond with a loyalty to Christ unless we speak in a language and to needs that he can understand. All of the motivations in his life are important points of contact, though what we seek to develop in him is determined by his real needs, be they conscious or unconscious.

We must use our preaching, teaching, and fellowship effectively. Personal counseling looms up as increasingly necessary. We need not list the known mechanics of advertising, use of literature, etc. But we do stress the importance of fellowship groups, prayer groups, lay participation. We are impelled to stress that the Church must go to man without waiting for him to come to the Church. He is more likely to answer when our Christian concern for him becomes a self-identification with him and the problems he seeks to solve. But undergirding all is the reliance on the power of God elicited by our constant prayers.

E. Ministry To Special Groups

The church's aim is to reach every man in every group and station. If the church is really to do this, however, it must be on guard against the danger of misunderstanding, neglecting, or alienating certain groups by reason of a failure to meet their specific needs.

This is true, for example, of great sections of the laboring population. Ministers and lay leaders from other walks of life need to understand the worker's problems, the nature and conditions of his employment, the significance of membership in the labor union, and the aspirations of the labor movement. Personal friendship, recognition

of his vocation, and opportunities for leadership in the church should become the accepted pattern.

Similarly, members of the Negro and other minority groups should be included in our community outreach. Simply because integration is the exception, special efforts must be made to establish inter-group fellowship on a Christian basis.

The evangelistically alert church will likewise seek opportunity to meet the special needs of otherwise by-passed groups—the aged, the alcoholic, members of particular vocations, or men and women in the armed forces.

F. Particular Responsibilities

1. LOCAL CHURCH

The local church must be set on fire with

a zeal and a concern for all men. Our preaching must be incessant and enthusiastic. Men and women must be given specific responsibilities. They must hear from those who experienced the joy of reaching the other man. Each man must find a place in and become a vital part of the church. The machinery must be a tool and not an end in itself. Lay evangelism, fellowship of prayer groups, and existing social, educational, and service groups must be used for this purpose. Committees on Evangelism and Christian Social Action are imperative. Recurring surveys of community and repeated evaluation of program looking toward improvement are essential.

2. SYNOD

The Synod has a special obligation to stir up the zeal of the minister. Preaching

BEHIND THESE FINDINGS

Television, radios and all the technics of our industrial era have produced complex social organizations but they have destroyed genuine community. They have reduced mankind to an amorphous mass which offers an open invitation to totalitarianism. They have undermined confidence and encouraged anxiety. They have dissipated meaning and bred undue trust in power and desire for creature comforts. They have misled men into thinking the important hinge of history was the atomic explosion. "Mass Society" is the end result of such loss of confidence in human reason and disintegration of mankind's vital faith in God.

What can produce genuine community? The Gospel of Jesus Christ; the Good News about God. This is the Church's "message" of old and also today and tomorrow. It is this which gives hope and meaning to our power-ridden, anxious, mass society. Even to the millions in America who have ignored this "message" of the Church, it holds the promise of new life. Only the Gospel can bring life and immortality to light in the lives and relationships of people, creating genuine community out of the "faceless" masses.

Such were the convictions of the church leaders gathered at Cleveland at Trinity Evangelical and Reformed Church, March 27-29, to consider the Church's Message and Mission. Among those present were the members of the Commission on Evangelism and the Commission on Christian Social Action who jointly sponsored the Convocation. These were joined by chairmen of evangelism and chairmen of social action in the synods from all over the country. Nearly all were pastors. A few were secretaries with national responsibility. They shared the concern for the whole Gospel with its mission to evangelize and to create community.

It was a hard-working conference. Each day began with worship led by the Rev. Purd E. Deitz, General Secretary of the Board of National Missions, continued with addresses by Dr. Elmer J. F. Arndt, the Rev. Robert F. Bilheimer, the Rev. Fred Hoskins, and other leaders of the Convocation, and included four sessions of simultaneous conferences on the themes, "What Is Our Gospel?" "What Is Our Mass Society?" "Reaching the Man" and "Training in Churchmanship." One supper meeting was addressed by Dr. Orville C. Jones on the topic, "The Church and the Industrial Worker." The first luncheon was addressed by Dr. L. W. Goebel, President of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. The last day the reports were discussed in plenary session and adopted. The seventy-five members worked faithfully and produced findings worthy of careful study.

Is Christian Community created by convocations? Certainly they help. Is it produced by campaigns and church programs and study of reports? Probably these have their uses. But the burning conviction of the Convocation was that community would be wrought out of "Mass Society" because God has been and is at work, not primarily because of what we or others do. God has willed it. God has given a foretaste in the fellowship of the Church. God has raised the hope of vital community and it is therefore our privilege and responsibility to proclaim, prepare and provide the conditions which speed such fulfillment. This is not the work of evangelism alone nor of social action alone. It is the work of the Church of Christ using both arms for the task. It is the mission of all members who have found this pearl of great price—the Gospel—and would share it with man in a Mass Society. Because it is such Good News for us all we are sharing choice insights of the Convocation with you in the hope that you will find ways of sharing them with your fellow-members of the church. Christian Community is God's promise and mankind's great hope.

RAY GIBBONS, Director
Council for Social Action
Congregational Christian Churches

missions, seminars, workshops, and convocation types of programs might be used at the expense of the usual reports, etc. The synod president needs to support the efforts of individual ministers with the full weight of his office. The Synod should sponsor round tables and inter-cultural programs. Serious consideration should be given to support of special ministries to the working man. It should assist local congregations to minister to their immediate communities.

3. GENERAL SYNOD

The General Synod should be concerned particularly with the training of the ministry—that the ministry become challenged and stimulated to reach every man. This must begin in the seminaries. It should allow for more opportunity for the local synod to study and plan for the effective witness to Christ within its own confines as a responsible part of the Church at large. The denomination cannot go forward unless responsibilities peculiar to the local synods are met.

A person acting as a liaison between church and organized labor should be considered. The General Synod has an obligation to plant churches in laboring communities as well as "high potential" suburbs. It has an obligation to assist congregations to keep their ministry in needy communities and to minister to the whole community, excluding no one. Then can the church expect to convince "Everyman" of its love and concern for him.

Those of us who have discovered the Risen Christ, like the women on Easter Morn, must be on the run to proclaim his Lordship and are under firm conviction and relentless compulsion to share our experience.

IV.

Training for Churchmanship

Since the end determines the means it is important that we first of all define what we mean by the terms "Churchman" and "Churchmanship" and we therefore begin with this definition:

A Churchman is any person who belongs to a specific community of Christians (congregation) and is committed to (a) its basic faith, (b) its general program, and (c) its community discipline.

Quantity orders of this issue for group study may be secured at 2c each from the Commission on Christian Social Action.

Professor Elmer Arndt's address on "The Gospel in a Mass Society" will be printed in an early issue of The Advance Advocate, copies of which may be secured from the Commission on Evangelism, 2969 West 25th Street, Cleveland 13, Ohio.

A. Preparation for Churchmanship

1. BASIC PREPARATION

(a) Requiring prospectives to attend a class of instruction before reception into the Church, giving each a chance to exclude himself if he dislikes the requirements.

(b) Having at least five sessions to which some present members including several elders are invited to become acquainted with the prospectives and to aid in their integration after reception.

(c) Asking all prospectives to join such a class no matter how they are to be received.

2. ADDITIONAL POSSIBILITIES

(a) Appointing a sponsor for each new member being received, asking him to guide the new member for at least a year.

(b) Keeping such classes intact as an additional adult church school class.

(c) Encouraging each class to make some memorial to the Church no matter how small.

(d) Putting members of such classes to some definite work. A check list might be used and a committee appointed to call members to serve as needed.

(e) Having reorientation courses for older members to challenge them to higher standards.

(f) Periodic preaching on minimum requirements for church members.

(g) Making minimum requirements simple; as, for example, (1) Worship regularly, (2) give generously, (3) commune faithfully, (4) learn continuously, (5) serve willingly, (6) witness courageously.

(h) Seeking to develop within our congregations cell groups made up of members who are interested in going beyond the above minimum requirements. This might best be done by organizing Bible Study groups that would work out and follow more demanding disciplines for Christian living to lead into a deeper experience of the Christian faith and to guide them in bearing a more significant witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

B. The Minister's Preparation

Ministers might be challenged to larger Churchmanship by the adoption of definite personal spiritual discipline to include:

1. Daily time for meditation and prayer.
2. Daily Bible reading. Use of a lectionary.
3. Periodic self-denial for sharing projects.
4. The responsible use of money, including perquisites, based on the tithe.
5. The reading of at least one significant book each month.

An alternate discipline suggested is: (1) Please God, not man; (2) Plot the day; (3) Live in adoration; be sure of God; (4) Proclaim the truth you really know and (5) Obey God's will and forget results.

C. Challenging Members To a Social Witness

- (1) Leading all members to count such

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Additional copies may be obtained for 2 cents each. Requests from Congregational Christians should be addressed to Ray Gibbons, Director, Council for Social Action, 289 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, New York. Requests by Evangelical and Reformed, and others, as well as news items and communications, should be addressed to the Editor, Huber F. Klemme, Commission on Christian Social Action, 2969 West 25th Street, Cleveland 13, Ohio.

a witness as a vital responsibility of Churchmen and women.

(2) Enabling members to understand the social issues of the times in the light of the Word of God and to take a definite stand concerning them.

(3) Leading our members to penetrate their prejudices, not to crystalize them. (An example would be to have a congregation face the possibility of a Negro family applying for membership.)

(4) Bearing our social witness in real situations arising in our communities.

D. Finding Service Opportunities

1. Nature and purpose of Christian Service

- (a) Ministering to personal and community needs.
- (b) Enabling our people to grow in Churchmanship.

2. General Responsibilities

- (a) Proclaiming Jesus Christ.
- (b) Teaching.
- (c) Healing (men's bodies and souls, the ministry of reconciliation).

3. Fields of Service.

Hospitals, nursing homes, (reading and praying for aged and neglected), challenging young people to take up teaching and bear witness to their faith in the schools, calling on members and prospectives, volunteer secretarial service, piano playing, teaching in the Church School, leading youth, challenging people to greater financial support and interpreting this in a money civilization (working an hour or two for the Lord), and community service.

E. Further Cultivation of the Spiritual Life

Understanding that there can be no spiritual life without a divine-human encounter, our contribution can be:

1. Winsome friendship and fellowship.
2. Attractive and effective worship services.
3. Inspiring and pointed preaching.
4. Strong educational programs.
5. Orientation courses for new and old members.
6. Effective use of the Family Altar.
7. Retreats, missions and convocations in the local church.
8. Introduction of religious literature into the home.
9. "Discipline for Christian Living."
10. Insistence upon high standards of Churchmanship.